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THE GARLAND OF LIFE

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THE GARLAND OF LIFE

POEMS WEST AND EAST

BY

JAMES H. COUSINS

FRANCIS SHEEHY-SKEFFINGTON. M.A., one of Ireland's best-known publicists, was arrested and shot during the first confusion of the rebellion in Dublin in April 1916, by an officer who was afterwards found by a courtmartial to be insane. When arrested, Mr. Skeffington was engaged in an endeavour to restrain the populace from disorder, an action in keeping with his earnest and varied humanitarianism, on some sides of which the writer was closely associated with him for several years. He was pure-hearted and fearless, and his intellectual honesty had passed into a proverb in his lifetime. His death, on the false assumption that he was concerned in an armed uprising, when, in fact, he was an opponent of warfare in any form save reasonable argument, has been lifted above its tragic irony, and become regarded in Europe and America as a sacrifice for the future peace of the world.

DEDICATION

TO FRANCIS SHEEHY-SKEFFINGTON

*When with dark wrongs we waged our strife
I found you pure, past praise or frown ;
But in the blinding light of life
Saw not your hovering martyr-crown ;
Nor dreamed that when in April showers
New life's green banners were unfurled,
You in the clash of iron powers
Should fall, and falling shake the world.
...O friend ! forgive these eyes that far
Held me from measure of your height,
And saw not, in your war with war
You of your end had inward sight,
And heard round your vicarious head
God's thunders to the nations call :
" Life is not nourished on the dead :
Who take the sword by sword shall fall !"
Forgive my love that saw no need
For such loud end in face of Spring
For you who were a selfless reed
Where Freedom's breath ceased not to sing.
... Oh ! honour fawns about your feet,
You who, with but a breath to live,
Let not death's bitter mar life's sweet,
But stood as One who said, " Forgive,
Father, they know not what they do !"
Ere the reluctant rifles cried
(Nay, to new life saluted !) you
On their blind error smiled, and died.*

*Yea, and upon our shattering grief
You smile in knowledge deeper grown,
Saying, " You count my life a leaf
By some dark wind to darkness blown :
It is not so !" And there you leave
The fact, and to new business press ;
A soul one-purposeful, to weave
Love's garment for the world's distress.
...Surely in that exalted place
Where lauding Seraphs round you press,
Some wistfulness will cross your face
Shadowed from our heart-loneliness ;
And through their harpings you will find
A hollowness in praise of Him ;
Our strife in darkness call to mind,
And slip between the Cherubim
Crying, " I want no starry crown,
I want no harp save one that thrills
Marching the Hosts of Reason down
To war with Darkness 'twixt the hills!"
And somehow, though we know not how,
Or may not know the well-known face,
Someone will glimpse your placid brow,
And feel you strongly in your place ;
You whom no power on earth had awed,
Whose hand would heal where sharp it fell,
Smite error on the Throne of God,
And smile on Truth though found in Hell.
...Therefore, O spirit ! in my book
I set your tragic honoured name
With songs on which you smiled to look,*

*Counting them kindred to the Flame ;
So that, when in some suffering land
You move as man or maid with men,
We two may know, clasp hand in hand,
And wage our Holy Wars again.*

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" Rarely is it the fortune of the reviewer to meet with verse of such distinction."—*New Ireland Review*.

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" Artistically Mr. Cousins can only be put below the two leaders of his movement; he has the calm intensity, the subtle strangeness of simplicity, which seems to be as easy as breathing to an Irish Poet."—*The Nation, London*.

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" It is a poem worthy of the name, passionate, musical and wise. It is the work of a man who thinks, and who sets others thinking."—*The Times Literary Supplement*.

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- STRAIGHT AND CROOKED (1915)

" Rare and distinguished work which will be treasured by all who love beauty.....an entirely original power of expression both in language and rhythm."—*The Observer, London*.

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PART I: WEST

Brigid, the Celtic Goddess of Poetry, was the daughter of the supreme God of Light, Dagda. She became the wife of Bress, the King of the Powers of Darkness, and later his enemy. These relationships are symbolical of the source of poetry in illumination; its necessity to consort for its expression with the dark realm of life, and its protest against that realm. Her three sons, deities of literature and art, had a common son called by a name which means knowledge. Brigid was worshipped in Western Europe up till the Roman occupation of Gaul (now France) in the third century A.D. It is said that devotees of hers have evaded the history of two thousand years, and evoke her as an Eternal Power in the shrine of the heart. The name Brigid is variously derived from the Samskrit *brīh*, to increase and elevate; from the Gaelic *brig*, power and authority; but she is more beloved as she comes gleaming through two Irish words that mean Bright Arrow, for is not Poetry the singing Shaft from the Bow of the Lord?

Saraswati, the Hindu Devi (Goddess) of literature, arts and knowledge, is pictured sitting on lotuses playing a sitar.

A HYMN TO THE SONG GODDESS

I

Mother of song and singers ! Mother of me
No less than of those made free
Of all thy realm of earth and sea and air,
Wherein, with feet in life set strongly fair,
With wings by noon or midnight splendours
filled,
They, for thy shadow here, a godlike dwelling
build.

. . . Mother of me no less,
Although these hands
Pluck no awakening harp for warlike bands
To rise, to march, to press
Beleaguered walls, or in the wilderness
Conjure from sterile sands
The loud and populous lands
Begotten of the seas ;
But far, Oh ! far from these,
My unadventuring harp,
Set on a grassy scarp
Midway between the sea, that question thrills,
And the deep-answering hills,
Echoes thy hidden music in a tone
Not all unknown

To some whose eyes have vision of the road
To thine occult abode.

II

Hellas knew thee by a name
Ninefold, sisterly, removed.
We, who glimpse the ruby flame
Guarded in thy circling hands,
Know thee nearer, deeply proved
One in sunned or clouded lands ;
Eastward, where the heavens glow,
Lotus-throned Saraswati ;
Westward, (islanded in spray,
Where a swift melodious hour
Outweighs the lure of wealth or power)
Brigid, Mother of the Three,
Gods whose knowledge darkens day.
O thou, Bright Arrow from the unseen Bow !
Daughter of the Lord of Light,
Spouse of him who rules the night,
And of thy spouse the foe !
Thou hast thy barb in thy true lover's breast ;
Thou woo'st him from the depths, yet on the
 crest
Thou slippest into silence, lest, in thee
Losing himself, thou lose a needed note
Out of the multitudinous throat

Of thy celestial harmony ;
Or, while his lips thy salutation win,
He lose thy soul within.

III

Mother of song and singers ! in hours replete
With joy, have we not cried with emptiness
Of the filled void, and longed and longed to
press

Behind the flying music of thy feet
Through the heart's purple twilight, and the
gleam

Along the lanterned chambers of the brain,
Into the crystal centre of thy strain ?
Yet, for our solace, we have caught, in stream,
Thunder and bird-note and the murmur of
trees,

In bat's jarred string and bugles of the bees,
Thy passing music ; for thou art not alone
In Love's loved voice the best-loved tone ;
The lure from life, to Life more bountiful ;
The harmony to lull

The clash of inharmonious time,
Unto which end man's ages slowly climb ;
But thou art also vocal in the spheres,
Moving to song too subtle for our ears :
Oh ! there are chantings in the winds that pass,
And poets hiding in each blade of grass,

For thou, God's eldest voice, that built the
whole,
Singest the choric world back to no less a goal.
. . . The black-browed storm strides loudly
from the south,
And flings himself full-length upon the pines
That he may shake from them a windy song
Giving him back his likeness : they from him
Learn a vast note against their singing time ;
And in his wake the happy flooded pools
Bubble faint wordings ; while the bleating
frogs
Chorus themselves to music past their range
In thirsty twilights, pushing out their joy
Songward : and these are thou, for thou hast set
Thine urgency in Earth's dim-uttering heart :
Thou spreadest thine insignia on the wave
Harp-strung with foam of tempest : unto thee
Life stirs through life ; and in the soundless
tomb,
Yea, in death's mould, thou hast epiphany
In the mute marriage hymn of dust to dust !

IV

Forgive me, Mother, the dear sin of praise,
Since thou thyself art Praise, and hast no need
For our poor quavering reed ;

Yet I will raise
A hymn of thankfulness that through my days
Thou didst, with song's bright sting,
Prick into agony my callow brain
With hungry questioning
And sweet creative pain.
What if it was not mine to lift star-clear
Thy face, ineffably unflawed,
Before a bending world, and hear
My harp-notes' echoed laud,
Nay, nor bring down
Heaven's waters to the stain
Of our deep-sullied earth;
Yet unto me was given the gradual crown,
The slow unfolded gain
Of mine own heart,
Bringing refreshment greening after dearth.

Mother of me ! in quiet paths apart,
Blazed through the midmost of the strife
For fuller freer life,
Thou led'st my feet past failing fire and fire,
And pale blown ashes that to sense belong,
Searching the shadows for a flying trace
Of thee, till came at last thy certain grace,—
Song lit with life, and life made sweet with
song.

V

And when the sun falls from his haughty noon,
 And underfoot a shadow slowly spreads
 Eastward, grey prophet of approaching night,
 Grant me, O Mother, no pale humbleness
 Of lessening heat, no mild apology
 For song in face of clamour that would claim
 Itself all sound, nor heed thy still small voice
 That shall consume all tumult. Grant me this :
 To hold the spirit greater than the word,
 Yet of the word to mould a worthy lip
 For thy pure ministration through the earth.
 Mother of singers, O most purely pure,
 How should we dare to name thy sacred name,
 We dead of heart, crude-blooded, muddy-
 tongued,
 But that, in exaltation, we have learned
 Thine eye is less on deed than on desire ?
 Wherefore, O Mother, in the dusking time
 I would outsing my morning ; would eschew,
 For what of praise Time's hand to me accords,
 The chested strut of consequential rook
 Loudly irrelevant. Yet, be it oblivion,
 I shall have joy in memory of hours
 Great in desire. Then wherefore should I
 make

The shrill complaint of seabirds in the dark ?
Nay, but as shadows deepen I would play
The Spring's incorrigible optimist,
The hearty thrush that from a topmost twig
Whistles the sun to sleep, and his last note
Holds through a dream under a nested wing,
Eyes eastward that the first faint hint of dawn
Fail not of salutation. Even so I
Would play at seesaw with the ardent sun
Across the fulcrum of a flame-topped hill ;
Rise as he falls, and, as he sinks from sight,
Catch glimpse of chaster glories hung aloft
Among the spreading leafage of the dark
Day-hidden, till at last I lift my head
Full in the bright companionship of stars,
Washed clear of stain in midnight's holy flood
For life's new hazard here or elsewhere.

VI

From song we come : through song to song we
go.

Mother of song and singers, thou dost house
All those who wear with joy upon their brows
Keen thorns of aspiration. Through their glow
Thou turnest thy light to cleansing fire. The
woe
Of Beauty that would clasp the world for
spouse,

They have, for urge thy lovers to arouse
To build more fair thy House of Life below.
More than accomplishment is on thy scrolls ;
In thee desire and its fruition meet ;
Yea, and for song the heart has mutely willed
Thou hast a place, with those majestic souls
Who lay their utmost tribute at thy feet—
Silence magnificent with song fulfilled.

THE HIGHER STOICISM

How shall I sing of others' woe
Who mine own griefs have left unsung ?
Through sorrowing strings ungainly go
My hands, and hold in leash my tongue.
I with such joy have lived so long
It stills the harp of mournful song.

Yet think not grief has passed me by.
I too have tasted life's unease ;
Have known death's blank and pain's low cry ;
But, deeper than the depth of these,
Some glance of vision still has caught
Love's purpose through disaster wrought.

Not faith alone has edged the glance
That looks beyond life's growing pile,
And in destroying Shiva's Dance .
Has glimpsed preserving Vishnu's smile.
Powers men deny, or darkly pray,
Have touched me in the full of day.

And though the Why and Whence be dark,
And questions Whitherward avail
No jot, I feel behind my barque
A homing wind is in the sail.
What fellow-travellers crowd the air
I know, and cast away despair.

I cannot hold it grievous doom
That Source and End are out of sight ;
Rather give thanks that these have room
To pull us past our Ring of Night :
Twain-faced, but single-purposed both.
To tease the soul from sensual sloth.

Wherefore it is not mine to raise
The chant of Passing and Revolt
With prophets of chill coming days
In which their birds of passion moult..
I give, for glooms in which they live,
The young-eyed Soul's affirmative.

They miss the forest-secret quite
Whose eyes are fixed on branch or bole..
They only read Fate's book aright
Who not in fragments seek the whole,
But feel the sap from life's deep root
Flow on toward sky-hidden fruit.

Thought-free from every burning hour,
They sure may find cool space to fill
Their heart's deep urn from wells of power-
Whose draught has grace to heal, and thrill
With gentleness their stoic hand
Who stand because they understand.

FLIGHT

Blue bird on the beechen bough !
Teach me how
I may spread my wings like you
In the blue ;
For I think I too can fly
If I only try....
Why ? you question, *Why ?*
I shall tell you why.
...Sometimes in the quiet night
Comes a light
In the middle of my head ;
Then I spread
Arms to left and right wingwise,
Slowly....slowly rise
From the ground
Without a sound ;
Hang a dizzy foot or so,
Then let go
And sail away
Like a flake of day
Blown across the wondering dark
Till my spark
Lengthens, flickers into tails,
Shakes and fails,
And I waken with a start
At my heart.

....And as now in sunset rays
On you I gaze. . and gaze. . and gaze,
I begin to think
I feel the round world sink ;
And I leave the ground, I rise
Through my dazzled eyes
To become a part of you,
Of the very jumping heart of you,
The fearless outward spring of you,
The spread glad wing of you :
Bird, O bird ! that now
Leaves the beechen bough,
See me, see me panting at your side
Swimming down the swirling flashing sunset
tide !

....Alas !

In the whispering grass
I am spread
As one dead.

....Overhead

You are but a turquoise gleam
Chuckling at my fallen dream.

....Yet I seem

In my mind to find the print
Of a hint
Of a deep-infolded Power
That shall flower

Not alone to flight
At your cloudy height,
But along a singing way
Through and past the cage of clay ;
Yea a Power that yet will spread
Rainbow wings of Godlihead,
When the inner has come out
Routing Doubt ;
Routing Doubt's twin-hearted wraith
Blindman Faith ;
When we leave control with the Soul,
Wisdom's goal,
And have wrought with will unshaking
All our dreaming into waking.

A ONE-SIDED CONVERSATION WITH A FIELD-MOUSE

You pass me like a deeper shade
Of twilight, where I musing lie.
In grass and hedge's mingling jade,
Then stop, and with a beady eye
Search me, till something in me stirs
To give you look for look, and see
Your secret, under spectral firs,
Faced by our mutual mystery.
Time was when in my childhood's days
It was a fearful thing to lie
In a wild creature's winkless gaze,
Dumb strangeness holding eye to eye ;
But love and wisdom found the link
Slowly in vision's opened book :
Our thoughts are shadows of one Think,
Our eyes are fragments of one Look.
So past these prisoning hands and feet,
Blent in the Spirit, equal, free,
Deep in one Being we may meet,
And touch a purer ecstasy
Than the loud storm of kindred blood
That strains to mingling, mad and blind,
Or the fantastic echoing flood
In shifting channels of the mind.

Yea, through far strangeness we may rest
In nearness that would miss our ken
Were I a mouse to claim your nest,
Or you a man who preyed on men !
....Lo, now across our sundering grooves
There comes a power that shakes us free.
In you some prophet impulse moves,
Some hidden retrospect in me ;
And where our pathways meet and merge,
We pierce the myth of earth and sky,
And mingle on the fluctuant verge
Where lives in one vast Living die.
....That was a link of midnight snapped !
Now revelation, clearly terse,
Shows us as wild-heart creatures trapped
Within the shuttered universe.
Yet for our solace we may smile,
Since He who our immurement wrought
Pulls on Himself the sky's huge pile,
And fast in His own trap is caught ;
And all those brazen-headed stars
Are nails that hold His wrestling Powers,
Nor shall He slip His prison bars
While you and I are held in ours ;
For (mystery, of light assured
In times far off we both shall see !)

Himself with us He has immured :
We are not parts of Him, but He !
Yea He, the Lion of the World,
Shares here our hunger and our drought ;
With us in life's vast net is curled,
And we must slowly gnaw Him out.
For this the wheels of being turn ;
For this the seer and the mole
And you and I with ardours burn
Caught palely from the labouring Soul
That beats upon life's yielding gates,
And shreds the veil by midnight drawn,
And confidently calm awaits
The slow disclosure of the Dawn.
. . . Meanwhile, good friend, we are agreed
That Life has music in her face,
To joy's fulfilment surely keyed,
And we are passing-notes in place ;
And as these branches lifted far
Spurn not the clay from which they grew,
We love not less the things that are,
But more for what they lead us to.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

(An Irish Legend)

“ Now I shall build a house of stone,
With lock and bar and slated roof ;
Of toil and thrift the offspring grown,
The solid recompense and proof,”

He boasted. . . But with greedy sight
He set a scheme and marked his ground,
And in a clouded silent night
He stripped stone-bare the fairies' mound ;

And through the dark, with sideways look
Like some lean dog that steals a bone,
The fairies' hoarded spoil he took,
Cursed it. . . and built his house of stone..

And when a single glittering star
Fell on the hilltop evil-eyed,
He signed the Cross, set lock and bar,
And slept the sleep of sated pride. . .

Slept till the hour of midnight broke
In frightful tumult on his brain.
On every stone a hammer-stroke
Rang with a sharp unearthly strain ;

And shining through the clashing gloom
Stern eyes were floating round his bed ;
And with a glimmering frown of doom
Two figures held him foot and head,

While one, the spokesman of the rest,
With folded arms and tragic pique,
Strutted across his heaving breast,
And uttered in a bat's thin squeak

These words : " It is an evil thing
To mint the golden fairy-weed,
And consecrated powers to bring
Under the chain of mortal greed.

" It is an evil thing to bind
Limbs that have Love's free service wrought,
Or from the niggard leash of mind
To slip the hounds of selfish thought :

" Evil when life's poor pots are filled
With purpose thin and stagnant grown,
And holy things are bent to build
A locked and darkened house of stone.

" No rest from labour, sound and sweet,
Night to the builder shall accord,
But on his madding brain shall beat
The fairy hammers of the Lord !"

He woke, and wondered whence the guilt
That through his being seemed to sound.
Then up he got, his house unbuilt,
And built again the fairies' mound.

And when his whispering neighbours drew
A sign that called him foolish-brained,
He smiled, because within he knew
A deeper wisdom he had gained.

LOVE IN THE HIGHEST

The kiss made sweet by love confessed,
Was sweeter made by parting's fear.
Our words were quick and warm with zest
Because of silence threatening near.
All that the heart of pleasure knew
Held ache of what might never be ;
And lyric hours in laughter flew
Across dumb gulfs of mystery.
. . . But now our hearts no distance rends.
We take as equal, rose and thorn ;
And know where each high moment ends
Love's deeper life is only born.
Our happy hearts now find each bliss
But Love's light-pitched and moving kraal ;
And know, clasped hands and clinging kiss
Not Love, but Love's pale ritual.
So we have found and kept the sweet
Of laughter in the face of time,
And found the quenchless fires that beat
Beneath slow age's gathering rime.
. . . Dear ! we have stilled the heart's wild
 strife
In ecstasy of Love's repose.
The rose has faded out of life,
For life itself is now the Rose !

FUGITIVE LOVE

Come out, my lizard, hidden in the dusk,
And kiss kiss kiss me on my longing mouth.
Then if you will, away to shades of musk
Perfumed with promise for my spirit's drouth.
Come down, my squirrel, from your branch
above.
Here on this breast, O shy one! cease from
strife.
Then if you must, O fugitive of love!
Play hide and seek around the tree of life.

THE SPENDTHRIFT

Lo ! the spendthrift Moon-man spills
Wealth of silver on the stream,
And the rich glad water thrills
Giving gleam for gleam ;

And the more his silver pile
Far he scatters from his store,
Earth and man with happy smile
Give him back the more.

Says the Moon-man, " Men (with tools !)
Count me dead long lives ago !

....Ask my joyous-hearted fools !
What do wise men *know* ?

Hear the Spendthrift's truest word
Would you know joy's utmost boon :
" Life is dead while life is stored."

....Brother, be a moon !

TO THE STILL-BORN CHILD
OF A FRIEND

Little barque that never knew
Sea-made music round your prow ;
Morn that died before its dew ;
Ageless thing untimed by Now ;
Wind that never stirred to breath ;
Door shut fast on rumours rife ;
You, who have not tasted life,
Cannot know the sweet of death !

Ah ! pale poet, on your tongue
Silence is the loudest word,
Ageing not, since never young ;
Chanting like a hidden bird :
Peace comes deeper from your strife ;
(Thus to us the Silence saith)
Not till you have tasted death
Can you know the sweet of life !

THE SHADOWY COMRADE

When comes that hour in which my heart
shall gaze

(Even as Dante on his Beatrice

Pale past recall of love's most fervent kiss)

On her who, living, filled my hungry days

With life and music, hope and a measure of
praise ;

Grant me, O Love ! thine eye, averring, " This

Is shard of the budded beech, the chrysalis

Cast where no more the new-winged spirit
stays."

So when the dear familiar thing decays,

I shall not grope in the clay for what I miss,

And at her hem of pearl and chrysoprase

Pluck her with sighs back to this realm of Dis ;

But in sweet hope shall haunt her heavenly
ways,

A shadowy comrade on the path to bliss.

THE SWORD OF THE LORD

Lord ! for the pride that boasted, " In hold ire
Wield we the Sword of the Lord," let not thy
brow

Blast us in wrath. . . Who trieth the nations
but Thou,

Thou whose Name as of old is Consuming Fire?
For the pigmy reach of the soul's enforced
desire,

The virtue dared in face of the threatening
Now,

Thou through our dreams hast driven Thy
quickenning plough

To stir our inanimate clay to Thy purpose
nigher.

" Give peace," we pray, " give peace in our
time, O Lord !"

But first give wisdom, deeper than deed or
word,

To learn that not till the inward conflict cease,
And the will of the flesh with Thine move in
accord,

Past self that is parent of strife, shall the
ancient Sword

Of Thy Love's purgation be sheathed in a
lasting peace.

CASTLES IN SPAIN

Those are the very hills of Spain
That lift their spears in morning light
Full-bladed to the charging main,
Like old Cervantes' gallant knight.
Could we but pierce the golden mist,
Now might we scan some castle wall
Made sweet by waking maid, sun-kissed
On lips most pure, most musical.
Yet, had we Druid power to leap
The waves, or travel Israel's way,
Would we from fancy's dream-lit sleep
Call us and you to glaring day ;
And bid your storied galleons sail
Pale phantoms down a long dead wind,
Laughed by our lithe lean ships of mail
Out of the harbour of the mind ?
No ! not one oar's-length nearer come,
Lest, for the dream that round you clings,
We take the hard insistent drum
And shameless pipe of real things.
Set on imagination's verge
That holds and shapes the wandering will,
Where sense and vision subtly merge,
Your mystery be mystery still ;

And still your fabled sunken gold
Gleam through the deeps of heart and brain,
And we our magic castle hold
Dream-built in an unsullied Spain.

*Off the Spanish coast,
October, 1915.*

BIRDS AT SEA

Criss-crossing our wake along the blue
Mediterranean Sea,
Wings agleam in the sunrays flew
Swiftly and tirelessly.

"Petrels, prophets of storm," said some.

"Swallows," said others, "from war-lands
come,

Sick of sulphur and death-winged hum,
Seeking a summer of peace."

Soon may their seeking cease !

But I, keen-sighted, clearly knew

They held not to land or sea,

But were bodied out of the thoughts that flew,
Dear friends ! the love-winged thoughts from
you

That followed us followed us over the blue
Mediterranean Sea.

Off Sicily, November 1915.

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PART II : EAST

■

Tamas and Sat referred to in "A Song in Praise of Earth," are the Vedantic equivalents of matter and spirit.

The koel is an Indian bird with the note of the blackbird and the habits of the cuckoo.

TO SAROJINI NAIDU

*From a lion great in death
Honey came, a scripture saith.
Yea, and out of ancient song
Sweetness cometh from the strong,—
Names that move but cannot pass,
Sappho, Dante, Kalidas,
And their singing kindred. . . Still.
Though we climb a lesser hill,
There are hidden heights to scale
Reckoned not in classic tale;
And on singers of our time
Waits a subtler power of rhyme
That can raise a fairy wind
Laying all the ghosts of mind,
Gaudy doubts that bend the knee
To a moment's ecstasy.
. . . Such a wind has moved your wings,
Bird that from life's prison sings!
Caged familiar of the skies
In whose spirit-lighted eyes
India's wisdom, deep and long,
Blossoms lightly into song,
Crowning with a deathless crown
You who sang death's menace down,
And in lyric joy displayed
Strength in weakness perfect made.
. . . Though not yours the sounding wing
Poised on splendid questioning,
Or the massy music lent*

*By a ruder instrument
Blaring all the foolish strife
'Twixt those lovers Death and Life ;
Yours is song in skyey flight
Unlaborious as the light,
Mixed with golden music won
From soul-nearness to the sun,
Native to a coming day
Far upon our human way
When in eyes of all shall shine
What is prophecy in thine.
...Wherefore, songstress, on our tongue
Grief for song you might have sung
Perishes in thankfulness
For the gift wherewith you bless
This our day,—no strained, profound
Chant in caverns underground,
Nor the sweetness of the strong
Echoed out of ancient song,
But (for loss our deeper gain)
Sweeter sweetness born of pain.*

A SONG IN PRAISE OF EARTH

*Tamas of Tamas, Sat of Sat,
Dead clay and life-diffusing sun,
Intimate This, remotest That
Behind their myriad shapes are one.*
So reads my book....And all around,
Glad nature quickens after rain.
The earth-brown peasant on his ground
Turning brown earth for future grain
Strides with his striding oxen twain.
Over the deep-dug silent pool
The weaver-bird has hung her nest
That swings in safety as a cool
Soft wind comes chanting from the west
Lifting the morning's filmy veil ;
And where my leafy shade is spread,
Koel to koel overhead
Blows his loud flute's ascending scale.
....So keenly Earth's clear challenge comes.
Led by the wind's heart-thrilling drums,
With straight full eye, and steady hand
Bearing for sword the mage's wand,
That all the proud and powerful past
Fades to a shadow shadow-cast,
And sets its ear against a tree
To catch Earth's simple mystery

Which none may utter mind to mind,
 But all who seek shall surely find.
Oh ! in such hours, from life apart
 Yet closer to its inmost heart,
 How freshly comes upon our dearth,
 How calmly on our gusty moods,
 The authenticity of Earth,
 The deep sincerity of woods,
 The pure strong passion of the sea ;
 The fluttering glad futility
 Of hosting moths that take to air,
 To " Whither ? " answer, " Anywhere !
 What matter ? 'Twixt the dawn and night
 All's home where there is wind and sun,
 And time for frolic, space for flight,
 And what-may-be when flight is done !"
How shrewdly comes from hedge and tree
 Rebuke from many a sounded fife
 To those who, looking, never see,
 And, too much living, miss great Life ;
 Who, snatching Wealth's bedraggled hem,
 The Spirit's bounty never knew
 When evening proffered unto them
 The moon-pearl on a pearly hand
 Of cloud outheld through deepest blue
 Above a sapphire-paven land ;

Who miss, for all the noise and glare
On passing pleasure vainly spent,
The ecstasy of those who share
Maid Beauty's chaste abandonment.
....Too long to Earth we dole the wage
Of proudly shallow patronage.
No need hath she for wreaths of song
'That boast them her interpreters.
Nay, far more fitly is it hers
'To lay her prophet-length along
Our deadness, and to meaning raise
The corpse of crowded empty days,
And set against our shrill unease
Her ancient quiet certainties.
"Put by," she counsels, "would you live,
Shed garments of the buried years.
New day must day's new garment give ;
Nor, spite of backward-glancing tears,
Can you take comfort from the old
If you would sight the Age of Gold.
Know that alone you proudly cast
The gage of war for this, to hold
Out of your tuneless iron age
Some relic of the mouldered past,
Some squalid sacred privilege.

Oh ! wiselier far my vagrants go
Who daily take with youthful laugh
The immortal Pilgrim's scrip and staff,
And, reading well my secret, know
That Joy takes never Peace to wife
While death usurps the place of life.
From wrinkled selfish thought they part,
And down love's pathways pure and plain
They reach, beyond the sundering brain,
The instant nuptials of the heart."

....Lo, unto eyes whose gaze is true,
She momentarily makes all things new ;
Changeless through change doth lightly pass.
Behold, the dry bent blade of grass
Whose shade and substance made a square
Now rounds its shadow to ellipse ;
And through a myriad thrilling tips
Her reach is onward everywhere,
Timing to dance of sun and sod
The young adventuring of God.
Yea, and though all when all is done
Behind their myriad shapes be one,
No truer wisdom through our days
Shall straighten out our devious ways
To where beyond the shadowy Fates
We shall have speech with One who waits,

Than to give thanks to God whose grace
Set eyes within our forward face,
Pathfinding for the runner Soul
Not back to start but on to goal.
....Who finds this wisdom finds the might
To climb the Tree of Life, and reach
Cool sanctuaries of restraint
Where poise is window unto sight,
And silence winnower of speech ;
Where love has lost the tiger-taint
In vision of the bridal mirth
That blends Divinity with Earth,
Bone of true bone, true flesh of flesh.
Inly they know what purpose broods
When midnight drags her starry mesh
Along the deep infinitudes ;
What pride gives dignity to dust ;
From trampled grape what heartening must ;
What love moves the confederate Powers
Wherewith she wields her lightest wand,
Or in dark salutary hours
Turns down a catastrophic hand.
....Softly they sleep whose heads have found
The solid comfort of the sod,
Who know outstretched on holy ground
That nearest Earth is nearest God.

A SONG AT DAWN

Voice of the Dawn, resistless voice
Through harmonies of sun and wave !
I hear you, and my limbs and veins rejoice
New risen from the night's deep grave.

I hear you, and my heart is glad
To feel your keen awakening lance.
No sweeter joy the dreamful darkness had
Than bulbul's song or insect's dance.

Roll up the gaudy scroll of dreams,
The tangled skein of vision-stuff :
Under the morning's branched and flowering
 beams
Life wholly lived is life enough.

Why look for deeper, fuller hours
With hours about us unfulfilled ?
The wiser mango greenly breaks in flowers
Though not a cloud its rain has spilled ;

And when the thankful arid ways
Have drunk its perfume, sweetly spread,
God shall bestow a recompense of days
That pour refreshment on its head.

O you who seek the far-described,
With nearness void ! hear Wisdom's art :
" You shall not lift from joy's exhaustless tide
More than the measure of the heart.
" Be *now* your dream : your dream shall *be*.
Day's light is dark to darkened eyes.
Fill out your circle till you break it, free.
Only the great to greatness rise."
Vainly for larger life we yearn,
Or queenlier blooms of truth to blow,
Till we in life's least moments gladly learn
To live the little truth we know.

UNDER THE BANYAN

Under the banyan thickly lie
Leaves like an Autumn newly shed,
Yet keen against the sapphire sky
The green of Spring breaks overhead.
So closely neighbour birth and death,
It seems the all-pervading sun
Holds in a trance-like pause of breath
The past and future blent in one.
Yea, folded in deep calm beside
Our shallow fret of joy or ruth,
Back on itself the living tide
Augustly flows from age to youth ;
For age in wrinkles witch-like stands
And leans great wisdom on her crutch,
Yet pushes forth adventuring hands
Earthward for youth to spring at touch.
Had we thy secret, ancient child,
Our hearts might lightlier pay time's toll ;
Count years behind, not on us piled,
Each hour the birth-time of the soul.
So might we thy large saneness share,
Root proud in clay and fruitage skied ;
Not wholly thinned to fire and air,
Nor in earth-darkness wholly tied.

Unto which end our prayer is made
That we from deeper vision won
Here, where the night-like slumbrous shade
Is cast and mixed with noonday sun,
May glimpse where fast the shuttle gleams,
Flying to weave in mystic ways
Something of daylight in our dreams,
Something of dreaming in our days.

BALANCE

Wail not that the thorny spear
Pricks about this Persian rose.
Rather count it good that here
Beauty out of harshness grows.

Though the feathery tamarind
Acid fruitage hangs in air,
Spiny cactus leather-skinned
Gives a sweetly savoured pear.

Let the parrots gorgeous-hued
Sharply scold across the sky,—
Plain-robed warblers of the wood
Sweetness out of shadow cry.

What if sunlight, fostering
Nested frailty hid from sight,
Strikes in gold along the wing
Of the circling slaughterous kite :—

Thus, and in the human heart
Where across a swinging gate
Joy and sorrow kiss or part,
Nature holds her balance straight ;

Wheels us in her roundabout,
Each to others' service pressed,
As our sun-screen, shredded out,
Makes a thieving squirrel's nest.
Yet, look deeper ; you may know
Something subtly intertwined
In the clash of foe and foe,
Or the link of kind with kind ;
Something that untwists the Rope,
And through slits in sound and shape
Finds towards a larger scope
Hidden pathways of escape.
Hold this truth ; the maze of things
By a single joy is stirred,
As a poet darkly sings
Meaning past his deepest word.

UNITY

High on the rock-paved praying-ground
The sons of Allah stand,
Then in obeisance, mute, profound,
Bend earthward head and hand.

In robe and turban many-hued
They bloom upon the mind
A bank of flowers in prayerful mood
That bends before a wind.

And here, beside the white-towered shrine,
God Shiva's ancient seat,
Field-blossoms in the sunlight shine
About my wandering feet.

Then as a breeze across my brow
On some glad errand runs
They bow as in devotion bow
Allah's and Shiva's sons.

So calm the encircling hills, so sweet
The jasmine-scented air,
God Man and Nature seem to meet
And blot out Here and There ;

And show, beneath their painted mask
One holy impulse stirs
Those flowers that grace from Allah ask,
These clay-born worshippers.
In such clear glimpses of the Whole
Our foolish barriers fall,
For who finds kinship with the soul
Is kindred unto all.

Madanapalle, South India.

TO RABINDRANATH TAGORE

I thought for golden poesy
In dedicated prose to pay,
Veiling impossibility
In that old kindly courteous way.

But all your flowing tide of fame
Went singing round my echoing shore
When on my page I put your name—
And made my debt but tenfold more !

Yea, and the world that holds your praise
Moves thus between two powers at feud,
Speech that undoes what it essays,
And silence like ingratitude.

Yet since a sacramental hand
May sanctify the humblest weed,
I lift our love's transforming wand
And give intention for the deed,

With one deep wish that, till the set
Of sun across your song's wide sea,
Our backs may bend with growing debt
For your pure golden poesy !

AFTER A LADY HAD PLAYED ON THE VINA

Because men's little hearts had turned away
After strange deities of power and pride,
The populous heavens (which to the wonder-
eyed

Stark savage held great hands that bade him
pray)

Shrank in chill reason to a span of day
Night-clasped; and gods, clean shorn of
homage, sighed

To leave Star-thrones changed to mere earth-
enskiéd,

Built there, as here, on silence and decay.

But unto us, O sister in song! to us,
Outcasts of pride and power, attuned alone

To sound as vina to the Spirit's will,

One came, whose presence, vastly luminous,
Thrilled us to prayer, while trumpets deeply
blown

Cried, "Lo! the Immortals mix with mortals-
still!"

INDIAN PARAPHRASES

I

A GOPI-SONG TO SRI KRISHNA

Someone spake of moon and sun ;
But for me in love grown wise,
Through the dark and light made one,
Only shone your searching eyes.

What, to those who never knew,
Was the midnight sky's expanse,
Looked my throbbing spirit through
With your comprehending glance.

And the long cloud-tresséd air
That to others moved beyond,
Wrapped me in your silken hair
Gemmed with pearl and diamond.

Now along the flowery grove
By the champak's odorous pile,
Eyes made vision-full by love
See your deep alluring smile.

Koel's note from tree to tree
Speaks your voice with sweetest smart,
And the dark blue rolling sea
Tells the pulsing of your heart.

And for me my happy doom
Shines upon your ageless face,
Bride of your eternal bloom
Held in your divine embrace.

*Paraphrased from the Tamil of
C. Subramania Bharati.*

II

THE MYSTIC CHURN

O ye whose feet all Godward run.
Pause ! for the Ever Shining One
Comes not for drum or perfumed silk.
He hides as *ghi* within the milk,
Essence enfolded, unexpressed.
Would you behold Him manifest ?—
Gather your eyes from quests above :
'Take you the churning-rod of Love :
Wrap round its upright stem the tense
'Two-ended cord, Intelligence....
Pull ! . . and for Wisdom loving-eyed,
Love in white Wisdom purified,
Unto your eyes made clear by grace
He shall unveil His shining Face.

*Paraphrased from the Tamil of
Saint Appar, early seventh century.*

III THE BARGAIN

Tuka to Iswara saith :
We shall take, if so Thou wilt,
Birth ; and learn of life and death ;
But we ask that Thou shalt fill
All our life-ways, dark and long,
With remembrance of Thy Face,
And with comrades rich in song
Mindful of our heavenly place.
So in frailty of the flesh
We may travel free from stain,
Miss the snaring senses' mesh,
Yea, and freedom's subtle chain.
....Song, and Thee the song to fill
In the space 'twixt birth and death,
Grant us these,—then have Thy will,
Tuka to Iswara saith.

*Paraphrased from the Marathi of
Tukaram, seventeenth century.*

IV THE SEVEN ARROWS

Seven wounds hurt me within :
A moon in daylight, pale and thin ;
Withered beauty past its hour ;
Water with no lotus-flower ;
Noble manhood void of mind ;
Wealth that knows not to be kind ;
Wisdom weak from hunger's sting ;
Evil counselling a king.
These (till life and I shall part)
Seven arrows pierce my heart.

*Paraphrased from the Samskrit of
Bhartrihari about seventh century.*

NALA MAKES A MISTAKE

So kindly me my lady eyed,
 Come on love's glad mission,
 All my being laughed, and cried :
 " Love has found contrition ! "
 Oh ! so bright her eye-beam glanced
 That in love's delirium
 All my happy fingers danced
 Shining with collirium
 Offered, not with hope to make
 Beauty beautifuller,
 But for old sweet custom's sake,
 To my heart's proud ruler.
Ah ! such fancies us o'ertake
 Who to love devote us !—
 What I looked on was a lake,
 And her eye—a lotus !
 Stepping down I quickly learned
 Life's cold erudition :
 Quenching flood on love that burned !
 Pity my condition.

Paraphrased from the Marathi of
Raghunatha Pandit, seventeenth century.

VI THE DEVOTEE

Only on my constant prayer
Lord ! to thee, my soul relies ;
I who no proud purpose bear,
Nor the burden of the wise.
No consoling boast is mine
Won from sacred pilgrimage :
Only to an inner shrine
Go my feet from youth to age.
Me no deep-eyed fastings waste,
Seeking thus a swifter goal :
Only day and night I taste
Quenchless hunger of the soul.
Yet though in the forest deep
I am but a wind-borne flower,
Knowing not the spells that keep
Danger far, nor words of power ;
Conning not the Vedic art
In Benares' calm retreat,
I, who only yield my heart,
Find all wisdom at thy Feet.

*Paraphrased from the Hindi of Rani Mirabai,
sixteenth century.*

VII

THE HOLY DANCE

(A Song to the Child Krishna)

Here in my courtyard, where the breeze
Bears odours of the champak trees,
And high in blue unclouded calm
Sways leisurely the fruited palm,
Come! Little One, at cool of day,
And on your flute soft music play.

Oh! fresh as music-haunted wind,
Come! thou enchanter of my mind.
Lift up thine ageless infant glance,
And in my heart's cool courtyard dance
The joy that foots the years along,
Till all my being break in song.

Dance! Holy Child. My melody
Shall speak our joy, who inly see
Heaven's courtyard here on earthly ground,
And hear a music past our sound,
And know in every joy and woe
God's onward footsteps dancing go!

From the same.

VIII

THE GARLAND OF LIFE

*Flowers plucked at dawn of day,
Garlanded love's glad way,
Lord ! at thy threshold, I, thy flower-girl, lay.*

*Yea, and a fairer flower
From my heart's hidden bower.
Ah ! let thy lips now speak the word of power,*

*Breaking to finer mould
This earth of me, to unfold
Fit blooms of grace for thee, Lord, to behold.*

*So shall my beaded throat
Find fuller, purer note,
To sing thy name ; and I to thee devote*

*My house of nights and days
In song, and of life's ways,
Joyous or sad, weave garlands in thy praise.*

From the same.

NOTES

The Indian Paraphrases, pages 61 to 68, are efforts to reproduce the *spirit* of the originals. Line for line translation from the highly inflected Indian languages is impossible. The transliterations were made for me by Mr. V.R. Karandikar, B.A., from whom I learned the cadences that I have tried to echo.

Mr. C. S. Bharati is a well-known Tamil poet, living in political exile in the French province of Pondicherry, a few miles south of Madras, in company with Mr. Aurobindo Ghose, a writer of beautiful English poetry suffused with the Hellenic spirit. I made the "Gopi-song to Sri Krishna" from the transliteration of a friend, after the usual idea of regarding the Gopis (maidens) as human souls seeking union with the Divine Soul; but I found afterwards that Mr. Bharati's intention (following out his idea of Divinity as both Man and Woman, and capable of being addressed in either way) was to figure Sri Krishna as the Beloved Woman addressed by the human soul as the Lover.

The Rani (Princess) Mirabai was a Rajput lady whose saintly life has passed into the Indian classics of story. Her songs are known

everywhere. She was a devout follower of the Vaishnavite worship which addresses itself to Vishnu (the Preserver in the Hindu Trinity) in his forms as Govinda and Krishna. The Vaishnavite worship is less metaphysical and more devotional than other forms of Indian religion : but it shares with the others a fundamental esotericism that brings them into affinity with the essence of all the world's great religions.

I have written elsewhere of the other poets whom I have paraphrased, as members of a "long line of philosopher-poets to whom their philosophy was so much a thing of life, so exalted by the joy of discovery and experience, so vitalised by emotion, that it was the most natural thing in the world for them to express in poetry the thoughts that to them were charged with feeling, and the feelings that to them were made coherent by thought."

Page 63 : Iswara is the supreme Spirit.

Page 65 : Collirium is a dark powder used by Indian women for beautifying and healing the eyes.

Nala is an epic hero about whose love-story many songs have been sung.

By the same Author

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